

VIRGINIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING COUNCIL

Summary of Session Three Held on August 25, 2005

Introduction

Paul Hirschbiel welcomed participants to the third session of Virginia's Early Learning Council. Rob Dugger then outlined the goals for the day:

- ❑ To examine work being done and lessons learned in other states and on the national level;
- ❑ To identify from the above what is most applicable to Virginia;
- ❑ To develop preliminary recommendations about appropriate governance and infrastructure for Virginia.

Dean Clifford then reviewed some of the observations emerging from Session Two, particularly highlighting the following:

- ❑ Strengths in current early childhood programming in Virginia, particularly those exhibited by Head Start, the Virginia Preschool Program, and the Child Development Block Grant;
- ❑ Challenges or gaps mentioned by Panel members, including such concerns as
 - Little state oversight or coordination of Head Start
 - Overlap and insufficient coordination between Head Start and VPI
 - Income eligibility requirements which exclude many working families from access to services, coupled with high costs for child care/preschool programs;
 - Local variations in VPI services and curriculum;
 - Difficulties in finding qualified preschool teachers in early childhood programs;
 - Convoluted and complex licensing codes for child care;
 - The fact that neither funding nor licensing assure quality in early childhood education/care programs, both in terms of program standards and staff preparation;
 - Insufficient supply of high quality infant and toddler care, as well as insufficient services for children in foster care;
 - The need for a plan that ensures smooth transition between the early years and K-12;
 - The need to address behavioral issues in children, particularly through training for teachers and parents;
 - The lack of parental and public awareness of the importance of and nature of high quality early childhood education.
- ❑ Some of the possible recommendations emerging from the Panel discussion, such as
 - Emphasizing and assuring quality in early childhood care and education;
 - Coordination of early childhood education services;
 - Integration of funding streams in early childhood education;
 - Expanding child care assistance and access to VPI and Head Start to families not currently available;
 - Launching a vigorous public education campaign.
- ❑ Preliminary priorities, suggestions, or recommendations emerging from small group discussion, including
 - Conducting a policy audit;
 - Establishing a clear vision for the early childhood system in Virginia;
 - Identifying and quantifying quality in early childhood education;
 - Establishing benchmarks for the early childhood system, with the capacity to collect data on changes in the system;
 - Provision of parent education and outreach;
 - Securing gubernatorial support and matching funds from the private sector;

- Providing incentives for providers to improve the quality of services.
- A number of initial thoughts and strategies for reaching various groups to be involved in a broad consortium, public and private, working to improve early childhood services.

The facilitator also reviewed materials supplied to participants by email, highlighting some of the lessons learned and approaches tried by other states.

Presentations

Three presenters then offered the story of their early childhood efforts, with a few highlights summarized briefly as follows:

North Carolina's Smart Start

- Key concepts
 - Comprehensive approach
 - Designed to benefit all children
 - Public-private partnership
 - Top/down and bottom up strategies
 - Local decision-making
 - Family involvement and input
 - Moving from pilot efforts (12 areas) to statewide (all 100 counties)
 - Designated stream of funding from state, blended with private and other public funds
- Vision: *Every child in North Carolina will arrive at school healthy and prepared for success.*
- Role of North Carolina Partnership for Children (a private, 501(c)3 non-profit providing oversight and governance for Smart Start, with Directors appointed by both the governor and legislative leadership)
 - Manages/allocates/approves uses of Smart Start funds
 - Sets policies
 - Sets statewide performance standards
 - Provides technical assistance and training
 - Raises funds
 - Leads public outreach and engagement efforts, as well as statewide advocacy
 - Provides leadership at the state level to the early childhood system
- Organization/role of local Partnerships
 - New 501(c)3 organizations, with collaborative Boards of Directors
 - Establish a county vision for young children
 - Conduct regular assessments of needs and resources in the county
 - Create strategic plans for services benefiting children and families
 - Raise matching funds
 - Act as the leader and convener of the local early childhood system
- Core Services provided
 - Improving the quality of child care programs
 - Making child care and education affordable
 - Making child care and education accessible
 - Supporting families with needed services
 - Delivering comprehensive health care and education
- Other key components
 - 5-Star Child care licensing system
 - T.E.A.C.H. scholarships for early childhood educators
 - WAGES to improve compensation for early childhood educators
 - More at Four at-risk preschool program

- ❑ Some results
 - Improved school readiness outcomes
 - Improved end-of-grade test results at 3rd grade
 - Raised basic requirements for child care workers
 - Established five levels of quality child care and measured increase in numbers of children in higher quality programs
 - Raised education levels of early childhood teachers
 - Reduced turnover rates among teachers
 - Established early childhood programs in all 58 community colleges with a statewide articulation agreement between these programs and state universities
 - Increased bipartisan support for early childhood work.
- ❑ Lessons learned
 - Begin with a comprehensive vision.
 - Understand that it is critically important to have/develop one or more champions.
 - Take time to plan—but take advantage of opportunities.
 - Build fiscal and program accountability into the design.
 - Build local infrastructure.
 - Never under-estimate the political climate/aspects of the program. Planning needs to be strategic, taking possible political support and objection into account at every step.
 - Create an effective advocacy plan for long-term success.
 - Build parents and business advocates into legislative advocacy.
 - In the early stages:
 - Find ways to build/fund local entities early in the process;
 - Secure early donations from business
 - Build a diverse coalition;
 - Think broadly.

Oklahoma's Partnership for School Readiness

- ❑ Vision: *All Oklahoma will be healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.*
- ❑ Mission: *"To maximize the potential of each young child through all available public and private resources."*
- ❑ Desired outcomes
 - *Families nurture, teach and provide for their young children.*
 - *Children will be born healthy and remain healthy.*
 - *Families with young children are able to find and afford high-quality child care when needed.*
 - *Children enter school prepared to learn and continue to succeed.*
- ❑ Initial strategies
 - Enact public policy
 - Create statewide public-private partnership
 - Implement public engagement campaign
 - Mobilize communities
- ❑ History
 - Success By 6 efforts in 12 Oklahoma communities
 - Governors' Task Force on Early Childhood makes recommendations; advocates legislation which is then vetoed by the Governor.
 - Business leaders remain engaged, continue to advocate for change
 - Legislation establishes the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness
 - Efforts are expanded to 16 communities, focusing on identified results and strategies
 - State appropriates \$2 million in FY 2005
 - Public engagement campaign is launched

- ❑ Resources being used
 - Bank of America/United Way Success By 6
 - Child Care Block Grant funds through the Department of Human Services
 - BUILD Initiative grant
 - Lucent funding
 - Smart Start Technical Assistance
 - SECCS/Title V Maternal and Child Health
 - Private Funds
 - Better Baby Care campaign
- ❑ Successes
 - Measured differences in the 16 communities
 - Business leaders engaged
 - Governor and First Lady championing work
 - Public awareness increased
 - More emphasis on the early years
 - Legislative appropriation
- ❑ Challenges
 - Launching a systemic initiative, rather than simply expanding programs
 - Obtaining financial and human resources (Sufficient staffing is critical!)
 - Effecting genuine systems change
 - Complications of start-up
 - Engaging partners and keeping them engaged
 - Pursuing overall vision and primary mission, not *just* school readiness
- ❑ Next steps
 - Creating an early childhood systems model and plan
 - Addressing improved governance
 - Maintaining work in all 16 communities and expanding to additional communities
 - Evaluating state and local initiatives
 - Increasing public engagement and awareness
 - Producing several statewide products

Colorado's Consolidated Child Care Pilots and Systems Work

- ❑ Background
 - Early leadership and successful efforts under Governor Romer
 - Legislation establishing Consolidated Child Care Pilots in 15 areas of the state, with some funding from Child Care Block Grant; the right to ask for waivers from policies perceived as barriers to effective services; and the establishment of local collaborative councils, each with at least one staff position to coordinate local efforts.
 - Creation of a State Systems Team, bringing together volunteers from most state departments and organizations involved with young children and their families; working to expand the Child Care Commission's Blueprint for early childhood into a true strategic plan for an early childhood system; challenged by lack of authority (not appointed by governor or legislature.)
 - Participation in a number of opportunities for technical assistance and/or funding, including
 - Smart Start Technical Assistance
 - School Readiness Indicators Project
 - Policy Matters project
 - Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant
- ❑ Vision: *All children are valued and thriving.*
- ❑ Mission: *The Early Childhood State System Team is leading the development and implementation of an early childhood system.*

- ❑ Goals (A rationale, objectives and action steps have also been developed for each goal.)
 - **Program Quality and Standards:** Services and supports provided for all children and their families will be high quality, standards-driven, and developmentally appropriate.
 - **Program availability:** The early childhood system has the capacity to provide accessible services and supports for all children and their families.
 - **Parent and Family Engagement:** All parents and families are partners in the early childhood system.
 - **Professional and workforce development:** The early childhood system ensures integrated and formalized ongoing professional and workforce development.
 - **Public Engagement:** The public understands the importance of, places a high priority on and promotes the early childhood system.
 - **Accountability:** The early childhood system is accountable for children's readiness for school and life.
 - **Funding and Finance:** The early childhood system has adequate, sustainable and flexible funding and resources from a broad array of public and private partners.
- ❑ Proposed governance: The task force working on organizational structure has drafted a proposal for an organizational model for oversight of the early childhood system which includes a legislatively created collaborative board (quasi-governmental) and a non-profit service organization, as well as local partnerships, with programs offered at the local level (under the guidance of the state organizations), resources at both the local and state level, and accountability flowing from the local level to the state organizations and on to the legislature.
- ❑ Challenges: A few of the challenges faced by Colorado include
 - No visible and powerful champion at the state level;
 - Very limited funding (Colorado has made creative and effective use of existing streams, such as the quality set-aside in the Child Care Block Grant, funding for a School Readiness Initiative, the Comprehensive Early Childhood Systems grant, and other grant funds, but does not have a designated state funding stream for early childhood.);
 - A highly restrictive tax code;
 - No authorized state-level organization to lead systems work;
 - A conservative political climate.

A vigorous question and answer discussion period followed each presentation.

Small group work

Participants then divided into two groups to address specific questions, with recorded discussion including the following observations:

Group One

- ❑ *As you listened to the presentations and/or read information about early childhood work in other states, what seemed most applicable to Virginia in terms of*
 - *Overall approach?*
 - Plans should address all children.
 - A public-private, broad-based partnership seems best.
 - Collaboration is critically important.
 - Business involvement is necessary.
 - The system should enable local communities to address local gaps.
 - It is important to create a culture of education.
 - NC and OK were motivated by concern about long-term economic growth and job creation.
 - *Goals and Strategies?*
 - Ensure that children 0-5 are healthy, prepared to learn, effectively socialized.

- Assure that Pre-K is preparation for K-12
 - Educate the public about the gap between what exists and what is needed for kids (both in the present and past)
 - Parents must be educated about child care quality to make informed choices.
 - *Also needed: data from Kids Count to guide plans; community priorities*
- *What process and initial steps would you recommend for moving forward with comprehensive early childhood work in Virginia?*
 - Get facts on how many children are in child care and pre-K
 - Make a full economic case for early childhood education
 - Involve various constituencies (Public-private, parents, preachers, pediatricians, providers {the 5 Ps}; business, child care providers)
 - Get business community to clamor for early childhood education
 - Take a “road show” out to communities to build the case for and demand for early childhood systems work
 - Involve the faith community and parents.
 - Explore the possibilities for pilot projects—a pilot approach could be successfully moved through the legislature.

Group Two

- *How would you frame the overall approach to this work?*
 - Adapt the successful approach used by North Carolina: a public-private partnership. Use as much as possible of the NC model, but adapt as needed for Virginia. Private sector buy-in and ownership is vitally important!
 - Champions are needed in both the public and private sector. Having a governor’s leadership (as with NC’s Governor Hunt) raises the issue to the top.
 - In Virginia, it should not be seen as a “state” initiative; rather, champions are needed from all sectors.
 - A strategic plan is critically important.
 - Both public and private funding will be essential.
 - Need to explore the climate for what this organization should be.
 - There was discussion as to the “pros” of having the legislature establish a private 501(c)3 organization to provide governance
 - Greater authority
 - A non-profit organization can by-pass certain bureaucratic obstacles (such as tedious procurement procedures) and access some resources not available to public institutions.
 - Legislative buy-in increases the possibility of continuity and sustainability.
 - However, establishing individual non-profits at every local level may be difficult. Try to avoid rigidity in this approach. A local entity must be identified that is willing to be the fiscal agent to be audited as to use of resources.
 - While some suggested that a 501(c)3 should not be required in each community, it was suggested that a number of foundations will only give funding to 501(c)3 entities.
- *Of the oversight and integrating functions to be performed, what do you see as absolutely essential?*
 - Evaluation, with some standard outcomes to be measured across the state, as well as locally-based evaluation.
 - Use developmental milestones for children.
 - Establish some uniform expectations for the work to be done in communities, but also allow some community determination of priorities.
 - Annual audits

- Technical assistance and training to help communities in their work.
- Collaboration both within the local level and across communities.
- Buy-in from various stakeholders.

Note: Time did not permit discussion of a number of the questions on the groups' worksheets. We will re-visit these in Session Four.

Next steps

- ❑ Remember to use the worksheet (chart) distributed at this meeting as a tool to begin gathering your thoughts on possible recommendations to be made by this group. Your thinking prior to the meeting will ensure a productive fourth session!
- ❑ Don't forget to mark your calendar:
 - **Session Four: September 12, Noon until 4:00 pm**
 - **Session Five: October 3, Noon until 4:00 pm**